

General Plan Summary

Purpose of the General Plan

The role of each community's General Plan is to act as a constitution for development, the foundation upon which all land use decisions are to be based. Land use decisions encompass not only zoning, but circulation, design, open space, and other factors. The General Plan is a policy document to assist and guide local decision makers.

The Town of Los Gatos is always evolving with new opportunities to mold the future character of the Town, while preserving the best of its past and present. The General Plan addresses the issues that are important to consider in the ongoing development of our community. The General Plan explains how our natural resources and physical features are to be maintained and enhanced and directs how we incorporate them into in-fill projects, new projects and our community investments. The General Plan also identifies land uses and their distribution. To be considered consistent with the General Plan, a project must not only be consistent with the Land Use Plan, but it must also further the goals of all elements of the General Plan and meet the intent of its policies.

The Town Council and Planning Commission use the General Plan to evaluate land use changes, make funding and budget recommendations and decisions, and to evaluate specific development proposals. Town staff uses the General Plan to regulate building and development and to make recommendations on projects to the Planning Commission and the Town Council. Residents, neighborhood groups and developers also use the General Plan to understand the Town's long range plans and to evaluate specific development proposals.

California Government Code Section 65300 requires that the General Plan be comprehensive, internally consistent, and long-term. The Plan should be clearly written, available to all those concerned with the community's development, and easy to administer. The Los Gatos 2020 General Plan supersedes the previous General Plan, adopted in 2000.

The 2020 General Plan focuses on promoting sustainability which, for the purpose of the General Plan, means using resources in the present in a manner that does not compromise the choices and quality of life of future generations. This goal can be met several ways, including increasing alternative modes of transportation, maintaining a healthy local economy, and preserving open space.

Organization and Contents of the General Plan

The State requires that the General Plan contain seven elements: Land Use, Circulation, Housing, Open Space, Noise, Safety, and Conservation. Although jurisdictions are required to address all issues specified in State law, the General Plan may be organized in a way that best suits individual jurisdictions. Given Los Gatos's unique characteristics and needs, the following elements are included in the Los Gatos 2020 General Plan: Land Use; Community Design;

Housing; Transportation; Vasona Light Rail; Open Space and Recreation; Environment and Sustainability; Noise; Safety; and Human Services.

Each element of the 2020 General Plan contains background information, guiding principles, and a series of goals, policies, and actions.

These goals, policies, and actions provide guidance to the Town on how to direct change and manage its resources over the next 10 years as many of these are long term in nature. For that reason, not all may be fully realized by 2020 due to fiscal constraints.

Policies and actions are at the same level of importance, and are both intended to implement goals. In most cases, goals have both implementing policies and actions. In some cases a goal may be implemented exclusively through either policies or actions. In general, policies that use the word “shall” or “require” are mandatory. Policies that use the word “should” or “explore” are not mandatory; these policies provide guidance to the Town, but the Town is not required to follow them if the Town finds that the policy is not appropriate for a particular situation or if there are other factors, such as budget limitations, that would make it difficult to follow the policy direction. Policies that use the word “encourage” or “promote” communicate to landowners, applicants and other persons, policies that the Town supports but either does not have the authority to enforce or prefers not to make a mandatory requirement.

The 2020 General Plan is intended to meet multiple, and sometimes competing, policy objectives. Therefore, the Town may not be able to adhere to every policy in every decision that it makes to implement this General Plan. The Town Council has final discretion over which policy objective will have priority in instances where there are competing policy objectives affecting a single decision.